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Progress in the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States

Report of the Secretary-General

Addendum

Regional institutions and technical cooperation for the sustainable development of small island developing States*

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I. Introduction

1. It is generally agreed that small island developing States stand to gain much from close cooperation at the regional and subregional levels. As a matter of fact, regional and subregional cooperation offers the only opportunity for small island developing States to avail themselves of economies of scale in a number of areas, such as higher education and training, air and sea transport, technology assessment, and prevention of dumping of hazardous and toxic wastes and sewage in regional areas. In those and other areas, regional cooperation will be conducive to effectiveness and enhanced efficiency through the elimination of duplication of national facilities and efforts and through the maximization of complementarities among small island developing States. Those considerations have certainly not escaped the attention of small island developing States. Considerable effort at regional cooperation has already been made with regard to a variety of activities.

II. Progress achieved in strengthening regional cooperation

A. Institution-building

2. Small island developing States in the Pacific region have developed a well organized structure of eight regional intergovernmental organizations, each with a particular focus funded by member contributions: the Forum Fisheries Agency, the Forum Secretariat, the Pacific Islands Development Programme, the South Pacific Commission, the South Pacific Regional Environment Programme (SPREP), the South Pacific Geoscience Commission, the Tourism Commission of the South Pacific and the University of the South Pacific. In order to avoid duplication and harmonize their activities, the above organizations have established the South Pacific Organizations Coordinating Committee, a key function of which is to coordinate regional programmes. In 1995, an agreement was reached to establish SPREP, formerly part of the South Pacific Forum, as an independent intergovernmental organization providing cooperation and assistance for the protection and improvement of environment in the South Pacific. In 1997, Governments of Pacific small island developing States signed the Waigani Convention on the prohibition of the import into the South Pacific and the control of transboundary movement and management within the South Pacific of hazardous wastes, and designated SPREP as the secretariat for the Convention.

3. In addition to strengthening their own regional institutions, most small island developing States in the Asia and Pacific region are members or associate members of the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (ESCAP), and participate actively in the annual sessions of ESCAP's Special Body for Pacific Island Countries and meetings of ESCAP legislative bodies. To further the sustainable development objectives of small island developing States in the Asia and Pacific region, ESCAP has established the ESCAP Pacific Operations Centre (ESCAP/POC) in Vanuatu.

4. In the Caribbean, the subregional headquarters of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for the Caribbean, in collaboration with the Caribbean Development and Cooperation Committee (CDCC) and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), has served as the regional coordination mechanism for the implementation of the Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States. That mechanism collaborates with a number of subregional intergovernmental organizations with a broad range of mandates, ranging from specific programme areas to comprehensive sustainable development programmes, including the Caribbean Centre for Development Administration, the Caribbean Conservation Association, the Caribbean Council for Science and Technology, the Caribbean Disaster Emergency Response Agency, the Caribbean Environment Health Institute, the Caribbean Tourism Organization, the Association of Caribbean States, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS). Available information indicates that member States of some of the organizations, such as OECS, have taken increasingly greater financial responsibility for their respective environmental programmes. In the case of OECS, member States contribute some 62 per cent to the secretariat's staff salaries and 30 per cent to administrative costs.

5. In the African region, the Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) has the mandate to monitor and coordinate the implementation of the Programme of Action but has not demonstrated much engagement. Only one regional intergovernmental organization in the region — the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), whose membership includes islands in the southwestern Indian Ocean — is actively engaged in the implementation of the Programme of Action. Three small island developing States are members of IOC, whose objectives are to strengthen social economic and political links among the people of its member States and to work towards improving their quality of life through enhanced cooperation. Member States of IOC see

cooperation in the subregion as an indispensable means of attaining sustainable development goals that are beyond the capacity of individual member countries.

B. Technical cooperation activities of regional institutions

6. A number of regional institutions have stepped up their offers to expand technical cooperation for the implementation of the Programme of Action in recent years. Information received from a number of regional institutions indicate, however, that they are still unable to meet the technical assistance needs of small island developing States in their respective regions on account of a number of constraints, which are briefly outlined in section III below. Technical assistance provided by regional institutions serve three broad purposes: strengthening of human resources capability for natural resources management, mainly through workshops and seminars; preparation of national action plans and programmes and policy briefs for sustainable development; and execution of sustainable development projects. Some highlights of technical cooperation activities of selected regional institutions are provided below.

7. In the follow-up to the Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States, ESCAP has undertaken more than 150 advisory and consultancy service missions at the request of small island developing States in the Asia and Pacific region. Among other things, ESCAP is currently implementing a region-wide project, with a Pacific islands component, on integrating environmental considerations into the economic decision-making process, with the eventual goal of developing modular training materials on various aspects of best practices through national studies. It is also working on a technical cooperation among developing countries project on enhancing trade and investment linkages between Pacific island countries and other countries in the region. ESCAP/POC has undertaken a number of activities aimed at strengthening the capacity of several non-United Nations regional bodies in collaboration with them, in such areas as organizational restructuring, standardization and quality management, and adjustment and reform. ESCAP/POC has cooperated with non-United Nations regional bodies in developing subregional and national programmes and projects that fulfil the goals and objectives of the Programme of Action. Its approach to implement programmes involves the sharing of ESCAP technical expertise with non-United Nations regional bodies and with small island developing States. SPREP has provided technical assistance for the development of national environmental management strategies in 12 Pacific small island developing States, and is currently carrying out an assessment of environmental legislation in several Pacific island countries in collaboration with UNEP. It is also undertaking environmental law training activities in the framework of the Capacity 21 programme in selected islands, and has planned a workshop on environmental treaties and conventions involving all Pacific island countries.

8. In the Caribbean, in collaboration with selected regional institutions, OAS is currently providing technical assistance for the execution of three major projects: assessment of coastal and marine problems; assessment of the current state of effluent disposal in the region; and comprehensive review of integrated coastal zone management legislative systems. An important aspect of those projects is to provide policy guidance for action. OECS is providing technical assistance to member States on request through its technical cooperation among member States mechanism, which involves accessing expertise resident within the public sector of one member State to help another; provision of financial resources for training; provision of technical information on natural resource management; and preparation of policy briefs.

9. In Africa, IOC provides technical assistance to member States through its permanent regional technical committee on environment, which is made up of high-level technical cadres from member States. The technical committee is responsible for identifying projects in member States and for formulating project proposals for consideration by IOC. It is also responsible for liaising with funding agencies to secure funding for approved projects and for executing the projects in member States. The technical committee is assisted by an ad hoc management committee for each approved project, which oversees the implementation of the project.

III. Constraints faced by regional institutions

10. Information received from regional institutions indicate that the effectiveness of regional institutions generally in delivering programmes and technical assistance is undermined by a number of factors at the financial, technical, institutional and policy levels. The single most important constraint faced by most regional institutions is inadequacy of financial resources to meet immediate needs of member States. As a result, several regional institutions are unable to carry out their core functions, including

provisions of international agreements, and remain overdependent on project funding.

11. Next in importance are the constraints posed by inadequacy of technically qualified manpower at the regional and subregional levels, as well as at the level of regional institutions. That deficiency impairs the ability of institutions to meet the demands of member States for technical assistance, and results in weak negotiating capacity in international forums, which is often reflected in small island developing States being provided with assistance that does not meet their expressed needs.

12. At the institutional level, a major constraint is the deficiency of regional mechanisms for coordinating the implementation of the Programme of Action, particularly in Africa and the Caribbean. In Africa, no regional coordination mechanism has been established. IOC, which includes major elements of the Programme of Action in its work programme, is not an official regional coordination mechanism: it does not comprise all African small island developing States, and has very meagre financial support. In the Caribbean, jointly with the CARICOM secretariat, ECLAC/CDCC has thus far served as a coordination mechanism only on an interim and therefore insecure basis, also with meagre financial support.

13. At the policy level, there is a lack of properly articulated policies on sustainable development, and very little or no integration of environmental dimensions in socio-economic policy planning at the national level, which makes it difficult to harmonize priorities at the regional and subregional levels, and to develop coherent and subregional programmes. Often there is considerable hesitancy on the part of national decision makers to implement recommendations of regional institutions or even decisions of regional intergovernmental bodies. In part, this is linked to the insufficiency of human and financial resources available for costly regional projects.

IV. Recommendations for future action

A. National level

14. To strengthen regional cooperation it will be necessary for all small island developing States to explicitly integrate environmental dimensions in the long-term policy planning process at the national level, and to identify priority areas for regional implementation in order to enable the development of coherent regional and subregional programmes.

15. In the recent past, small island developing States that are members of some regional institutions have increased their financial support for the running of those institutions. In order to enhance their effectiveness such support needs to be further strengthened so as to make it commensurate with the needs of all regional and subregional institutions. In some small island developing States regions, there is a need for greater political commitment to the implementation of regional programmes.

B. Regional level

16. Efforts to strengthen coordination among regional and subregional institutions have begun in the Pacific. Such efforts are needed in all small island developing States regions. For effective regional coordination of the implementation of the Programme of Action, there is a need to establish permanent regional coordination mechanisms and to provide them with resources commensurate with their needs from national and international sources. Effective permanent regional coordination mechanisms will also serve to facilitate interregional cooperation, of which there has been little, if any, to date.

17. Regional institutions need to make efforts to strengthen their own technical capacity in order to meet technical assistance needs of member States.

18. Regional and subregional institutions need to work more closely with national Governments to identify programmes and projects for the development of realistic regional and subregional programmes in the short and medium terms.

C. International level

19. In view of the obvious benefits to be derived from regional cooperation, the international community needs to adequately supplement the financial resources provided by member States for the support of regional institutions.

20. In order to enable regional institutions to effectively meet the technical assistance needs of member States, there is a need for the international community to assist regional institutions in building their technical capacity to levels that are commensurate with the needs of member States.

21. Although the prime responsibility for the execution of regional programmes and projects rests with small island developing States Governments, in view of the meagre resources of individual small island developing States and

the high costs of regional programmes there is an obvious need for adequate financial support from the international community for timely and effective implementation of regional programmes.

22. Relevant United Nations regional commissions and other United Nations bodies need to demonstrate a greater level of engagement in the implementation of the Programme of Action, particularly in the African region.